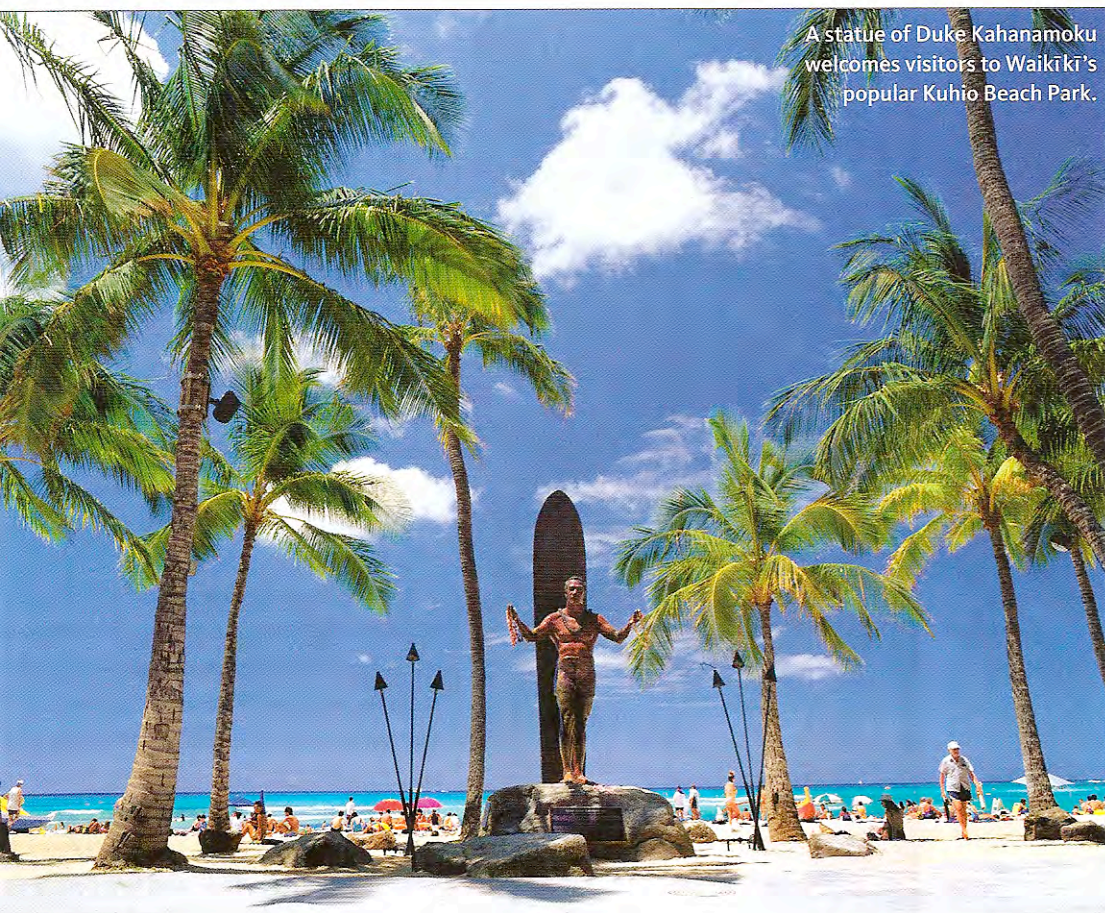


A statue of Duke Kahanamoku welcomes visitors to Waikīkī's popular Kuhio Beach Park.



Waikīkī Rising

By Jenny Quill

Long before it became a vacation destination, Waikīkī was the place where King Kamehameha and his successors built homes and *heiau* (places of worship) among the area's fish ponds and taro fields. To say that Waikīkī has changed since then is something of an understatement. Understandably, its warm, white beaches, surfer lifestyle and appealing accommodations led to its becoming an increasingly

popular visitor destination—tropical, exotic, alluring to mainland America.

When I first visited the city in 1998, I was amazed by the activity along Kalakaua Avenue as well as on the beach. When I moved to Honolulu a couple of years ago, I found even greater energy building in this seaside community. High-end hotels, shops, restaurants and clubs have all debuted in recent years, giving the city a renewed feeling of glamour and sophistication.

One of my favorite spots in Waikīkī is the beachside Mai Tai Bar at the Royal Hawaiian, a local landmark recognizable by its striking pink facade. In 2008, the hotel, which just marked its 82nd birthday, underwent a multimillion-dollar renovation that respected its illustrious history and preserved its Spanish-Moorish architecture. The suites were given face-lifts, the Mai Tai Bar received a chic update, and the hotel's main restaurant was

completely overhauled and renamed "Azure."

A dinner-only establishment, Azure focuses on locally sourced ingredients (such as Hamakua mushrooms and Kahuku corn) and freshly caught fish, purchased each day from the Honolulu Fish Auction. If you're hosting a group of gastronomes, you'll want to know that Azure offers the Royal Papa'aina ("royal table"), an eight-course tasting menu replete with wine pairings. The food is fantastic, and it has to be to complement the views—the Pacific stretching out for miles and Diamond Head rising beyond the city.

Not to be outdone on the foodie front, the Halekulani hotel recently introduced Table One, a restaurant within a restaurant located in the atrium of the hotel's Orchids Restaurant. Executive chef Vikram Garg customizes each five- or seven-course tasting menu to diners' preferences, using fresh, local ingredients. Depending on what you're in the mood for, Garg can whip up a lychee-and-scallop ceviche topped by chile lime soda and lotus seed popcorn, or a Big Island goat-cheese cheesecake with olive-toffee-and-white-chocolate ice cream.

Across the street is Halekulani's hipster



Waikīkī offers a wealth of water sports and recreation.

BUZZ PICTURES / ALAMY

sister, the Waikiki Parc Hotel, home of Nobu Waikiki, the celebrity-endorsed sushi hot spot named after its rock-star chef, Nobu Matsuhisa. The sushi is perfection on a plate, as is everything else, from the hot dishes to the desserts.

The Royal Hawaiian Center—an open-air mall that, in its previous incarnation, was something of an aging, beige fortress—recently went from meek to chic thanks to a smart rehab completed in 2008. With the arrival of Wolfgang’s Steakhouse by Wolfgang Zwiener, a posh take on the American steakhouse, and Doraku Sushi, a South Beach import serving Asian-fusion cuisine to the fashionable set, the dining options have become decidedly more stylish.

One of the best views of the city can be had from the Sheraton Waikiki’s 30th-floor restaurant, formerly known as the Hanohano Room, now Twist at Hanohano. The change is part of a larger effort to enhance all of the resort’s dining options, from revamped farm-to-table menus to decor that’s big on style. Twist at Hanohano serves three-, four- and five-course dinners that can be mixed and matched from selections on the regular dinner menu or from a rotating islands menu that highlights the cuisines of such far-flung locales as Mallorca, Spain, and the Seychelles Islands. Located adjacent to the restaurant, and taking advantage of the same attractive views, is Flights at Twist, a clever take on the traditional wine-bar concept: Oenophiles choose from five “airline” boarding passes, each representing a different flight of wines. Examples include Go Green (sustainable, organic) and ABC Reds (anything but cabernet).

Channeling its inner Las Vegas, the Sheraton also unveiled an infinity-edge pool and the Edge of Waikiki, a swim-up watering hole serving cocktails that go beyond the pervasive mai tai. For those toting toddlers and teenagers, the Sheraton built Helumoa Playground, a water wonderland with two freshwater swimming pools, a 70-foot-long, 15-foot-tall waterslide and two whirlpools.

The super pool is definitely the newest “it” item in town, and the Hilton Hawaiian

The Waialae Country Club
hosts the Sony Open in
Hawai'i each January.



COURTESY: SONY OPEN IN HAWAII

Village may have the grandest of them all, with the \$7 million Paradise Pool, which opened in early 2009. The aquatic playground features two freshwater pools with four slides, including a 77-foot lava-tube slide, three waterfalls and two spas. The pool—which is the Hilton's sixth and over-

looks the resort's recently restored 5-acre saltwater Duke Kahanamoku Lagoon—is part of the expansive property's newest addition, the Grand Waikikian, a 331-room timeshare development that opened its doors in 2008. Great for families looking to hang out in Waikīkī for a week or more,

WHEN IN WAIKĪKĪ

New Year's 'Ohana Festival, January 10

Celebrate the Year of the Tiger at this family friendly event hosted by the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai'i. Festivalgoers can enjoy Japanese food and check out arts and crafts, as well as entertainment, such as taiko performances. www.jcch.com.

2010 Sony Open in Hawaii, January 11–17

Watch 144 of the world's top golf pros, including 2009 champion Zach Johnson, tee off at the annual Sony Open, held at the Waialae Country Club. www.sonyopeninhawaii.com.

Pacific Island Arts Festival, January 23–24

Held at Kapiolani Park, across from the Honolulu Zoo, this ninth-annual festival showcases the work of nearly 100 local artists selling jewelry, stained glass, quilts, wood products and more.

HONOLULU ZOO

The Honolulu Zoo, located in Waikīkī, features a number of exhibits, including the African Savanna, Tropical Forest, Pacific Islands and Children's Zoo. Inhabitants include gazelles,

primates, rhinos, cheetahs, elephants, giraffes, lions, hippos and warthogs, as well as exotic birds and reptiles and much more. The zoo also offers after-hours family programs, such as “Snooze in the Zoo.” www.honolulu zoo.org

BISHOP MUSEUM

Bishop Museum was founded in 1889 by Charles Reed Bishop in honor of his late wife, Princess Bernice Pauahi Bishop, the last descendant of the royal Kamehameha family. The museum houses an extensive collection of artifacts, documents and photographs about Hawai‘i and other Pacific island cultures. www.bishopmuseum.org.

DIAMOND HEAD

Hike to the top of Waikīkī’s most iconic landmark. Take a car, bus or taxi to the Diamond Head State Monument parking lot, and then hike the 1.6-mile round-trip, sometimes-steep trail to the crater’s rim for a 360-degree view of the island. www.hawaiistateparks.org.

PEARL HARBOR

Memorializing the December 7, 1941, attack that drew the United States into WWII, Pearl Harbor is the top tourist destinations in Hawai‘i. In addition

to the USS Arizona Memorial the National Historic Landmark area—about 45-minutes’ drive from Waikīkī—also includes USS Missouri Memorial and the USS Bowfin submarine museum. www.nps.gov/valr/index.htm.

SURFING

Find the Duke Kahanamoku statue—which honors the father of modern surfing—at Kuhio Beach Park, and an expert surfing instructor is nearby. Individual and group lessons are available throughout the day at Kuhio Beach.

TORCH-LIGHTING CEREMONIES

Enjoy a local ritual at dusk as Hawaiian torch lighters run through Waikīkī lighting tiki torches. Viewing sites include the Royal Hawaiian Shopping Center, Kuhio Beach Park and the Hilton Hawaiian Village. Hula performances take place at the hula mound at Kuhio Beach Park.

THE MAGIC OF POLYNESIA

This popular show combines magic, illusions and pyrotechnics with Polynesian dance, song and chant. The Ohana Waikiki Beachcomber’s dinner and/or theater show introduces a revamped production this month. www.magicofpolynesia.com.

TOR JOHNSON, COURTESY: HAWAII TOURISM AUTHORITY



Waikīkī’s many restaurants focus on locally grown produce and artistic presentation.

the one- and two-bedroom suites are akin to luxury condos, with fully equipped kitchens and living and dining spaces.

Bringing his famous name to Waikīkī is Donald Trump, who opened Trump International Hotel & Tower, Waikiki Beach Walk this past fall. The 38-story luxury hotel, which has 462 guest rooms and suites and is just steps from the beach, has it all: the Spa at Trump, a sixth-floor infinity-edge pool and BLT Steak, an award-